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ABSTRACT

A statewide consortium effort in Connecticut was designed to increase the quantity and quality of services available to postsecondary students with learning disabilities (LD). Two model programs were funded and evaluated, and the consortium was developed to replicate the success of the models by encouraging program development throughout the state. Specifically, the purpose of the consortium, is to provide technical assistance on 10 topics, including admissions and intake procedures, diagnosis and assessment of adults with LD, service delivery, and financial considerations. Workshops were conducted and on-site assistance was provided. Key elements for success have included collaboration between parents and professionals, the development of political support, training for college administrators, and the availability of free, on-site technical assistance from experienced, data-based practitioners. (CL)

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THE CONNECTICUT CONSORTIUM: A STATEWIDE EFFORT TO DEVELOP AND ENHANCE LEARNING DISABILITY COLLEGE PROGRAMMING

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ABSTRACT

This paper details the development and implementation of a statewide consortium effort to increase the quantity and quality of services available to postsecondary students with learning disabilities. As key support groups joined forces with the Department of Higher Education, sufficient political impact was achieved to initiate the funding of two model programs. The success of these programs provided the base for the State to fund a consortium effort. This effort is described and results are reported.

THE CONNECTICUT CONSORTIUM: A STATEWIDE EFFORT TO DEVELOP AND ENHANCE LEARNING DISABILITY COLLEGE PROGRAMMING

Vogel (1987) noted that in spite of the increasing numbers of college students with learning disabilities seeking support services, institutions of higher education have been slow to respond. In an attempt to deal with this problem in Connecticut, a group of parents and professionals worked cooperatively to foster program development. The group included parents from ACLD of Connecticut, postsecondary disabled student services personnel, and special education professors. Through their efforts, more than half the institutions of higher education were impacted and a program development model worthy of emulation in other states was created. This paper describes the planning stage, model programs, training, and technical assistance implemented.

Planning Stage

Over a period of years, isolated attempts have been made to develop learning disability college programming. A group from ACLD of Connecticut made persistent efforts to encourage individual colleges to meet the needs of L.D. adults. At the time, a few colleges were attempting to provide informal program support for the learning disabled through disabled student, counseling, or developmental education services. Until 1984, however, the only comprehensive learning

disability programs available at the postsecondary level in Connecticut were in a few expensive private colleges.

The turning point in this situation occurred when the constituencies described above joined forces in a task force under the auspices of the Connecticut Department of Higher Education (DHE). Significant "clout" was created by these diverse groups cooperatively seeking the same goal combined with their impact on DHE which has a key political and fiscal role in higher education in Connecticut. The task force successfully made the case for L.D. college programs, lobbied in the legislature for fiscal support, and developed a sequenced approach for L.D. college program development. The first step was the funding of two model programs by the State legislature.

Model Programs

The task force formulated the Request For Proposals and functioned as a review team to select the grant recipients. A two year school, Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport and a four year school, the University of Connecticut in Storrs, were funded. From the outset, these programs were developed as "models" to be emulated by the other colleges in the state. They were not only to develop first rate comprehensive programs, but they were to model "how to" develop a L.D. support program. To that end, the Department

of Higher Education funded an independent evaluator who helped each school document the process of program development as well as evaluate the final product. The final evaluations of the programs demonstrated the effectiveness of L.D. support services at both two and four year colleges. The evaluation report (McGuire, 1986) at the end of the two year grant indicated that students in each school achieved a mean grade point average of almost 2.7 (B-) and more than 90% of the L.D. students served were eligible to return to school the following year. The very positive evaluation and the support of the Department of Higher Education encouraged both colleges to fund their L.D. programs as permanent student services. Expansion of services beyond these two schools was the next step undertaken

Connecticut Consortium

The Connecticut L.D. College Consortium was developed to replicate the success of the two model programs by encouraging program development throughout the state.

The Connecticut Consortium represents a joint effort of the Department of Higher Education which requested State funding, the L.D. task force which developed policy and the two postsecondary institutions which are providing the training and technical assistance to participating institutions. The consortium model is intended to promote

cooperative arrangements between institutions in order to maximize the use of existing resources, develop a cost effective approach for each institution, and enhance the ability of colleges in every region of the state to meet the needs of the growing number of learning disabled students enrolling on campuses across the state.

The purpose of the Consortium is to provide technical assistance concerning the following:

1. Legal implications of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act;
2. Admissions and intake procedures;
3. Diagnosis and assessment of adults with learning disabilities;
4. Programming and counseling;
5. Service delivery;
6. Record keeping to document services and results;
7. Financial considerations;
8. Evaluation of program efforts;
9. Awareness and inservice for faculty and staff; and
10. Ongoing cooperative arrangements with other consortium members. (Administrative Considerations, 1986, p. 10).

The Consortium efforts began with a series of workshops for higher education personnel in all colleges across the

state, both public and private. The letter of invitation from the Commissioner of Higher Education resulted in teams of administrators from 20 colleges (42.5% of Connecticut postsecondary institutions were represented) attending the workshops. The initial workshop was designed for high level administrative personnel (President, Director of Academic Affairs, Dean of Students, etc.) regarding their roles in fostering administrative support for L.D. college programming at their institution. The second workshop dealt with assisting mid-level managers (representatives from admissions, counseling, disabled student services, learning center, etc.) to develop policies and procedures to enhance the institution's ability to serve the learning disabled. Training was provided regarding admissions policies for the learning disabled, diagnostic instruments for L.D. adults, establishing counseling support and developing academic services. The third workshop provided direct service personnel with an array of intervention strategies to effectively plan for and implement programs to meet the needs of this population. Workshops were run on diagnosis, developing individual education programs, implementing remedial and learning strategies interventions, and counseling strategies.

While this workshop series progressed, on-site technical assistance was being delivered at a number of institutions.

As individual institutions made a commitment to serve this population and identified personnel to work in developing appropriate programming, Consortium personnel provided training in the ten areas previously described. As with the workshop series, training efforts typically began with administrators, moved on to managers and ended with training for direct service personnel and faculty.

Technical assistance activities included:

1. Designing two-year plans with program goals and objectives;
2. Collecting student (population) data, possible numbers in need of service;
3. Serving on advisory/policy boards to establish procedures regarding serving the learning disabled at individual institutions;
4. Consulting regarding meeting 504 Regulations;
5. Identifying appropriate diagnostic instruments, establishing an assessment battery, and training personnel to do diagnostic evaluations;
6. Helping to develop job specifications, identify prospective candidates, and/or participate in the selection process for L.D. staff;
7. Running on-site workshops on program development for college administrators or program implemention for

direct service staff;

8. Developing program evaluation procedures for individual institutions;
9. Identifying funding sources and providing training in "grantsmanship";
10. Helping to develop specific developmental and remedial courses for the learning disabled at specific colleges; and
11. Awareness and skill training for college faculty and student services personnel.

Additional activities included participation in advisory groups modifying Department of Rehabilitation Services policies regarding the learning disabled and the provision of training for high school counselors and learning disabilities specialists in their schools and through statewide workshops. The second year workshops will focus on transition from high school to college. Joint meetings will be held between high school and college personnel. Workshops for college personnel will focus on requested content including use of the computer, math instruction, developing writing skills and program development/evaluation. Future technical assistance efforts are aimed at developing as many self-sufficient permanently funded L.D. support programs as possible.

Results

Each of the three statewide workshops were attended by 50-100 participants representing approximately 75% of the institutions of higher education in Connecticut. An anonymous end of year evaluation conducted by the Department of Higher Education indicated that 94% of the respondents found the training sessions helpful in increasing skills for working with the learning disabled. One hundred percent (100%) indicated a desire to participate in training the following year. Of even great significance is the fact that more than half of the public colleges in the state are involved in on-site technical assistance. It is expected that most of these will develop some type of ongoing L.D. support program by the end of next year. In addition, more than a half dozen private colleges have also received technical assistance support from the Consortium.

Summary

This is a critical time for the development of postsecondary programs for adults with learning disabilities. The Connecticut Consortium has demonstrated the efficacy of a statewide effort to develop and enhance such programs. Key elements for success include collaboration between parents and professionals, the development of political support, training programs initially

aimed at college administrators prior to working with student services personnel, and the availability of free, on-site technical assistance from experienced, data-based practitioners.

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